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REMARKS ON THE GENUS *AMBLYCERCUS* AND  
ITS ALLIES.

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Although the Icteridæ or Troupials, comprising as they do so many of the larger and more conspicuous of the Passerine birds, have naturally received a great deal of attention from ornithologists, and are in general better understood than perhaps any other one family of the Neotropical Region, there still remains much to learn concerning them, even from a systematic standpoint. In the course of a critical study of the group as represented in the collection of the Carnegie Museum, completed not long since, it was brought to light not only that some supposedly well-known species were involved in much confusion, but also that certain genera were badly in need of readjustment. The present paper deals with the genus *Amblycercus*, and is offered as an attempt to define the status and relationships of the several forms of this generic group, and to determine its position with reference to allied genera. In addition to the specimens in the Carnegie Museum I have had the privilege of studying certain pertinent material in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, for which courtesy I am indebted to Dr. Frank M. Chapman. As in previous papers by the writer, all measurements are in millimeters, and the length of the bill is that of the exposed culmen.

As accepted by Sclater (Catalogue Birds British Museum, XI, 1886, 326), the genus consists of two species, *A. solitarius* and "a smaller northern representative," *A. holosericeus*. Mr. Ridgway (Bulletin U. S. National Museum, II, 1902, 192-3) recognizes the same two species, pointing out that they "are really very distinct in certain structural details and may not

be truly congeneric." He gives the type of *Amblycercus* Cabanis (Museum Heineanum, I, 1851, 190) as *Cassicus nigerrimus* Spix = *C. solitarius* Vieillot. This is clearly a mistake, since Cabanis explicitly states "Amblyrhamphus Prevosti Less. \* \* \* bildet daher den Typus einer eignen Gruppe: Gen. **Amblycercus n. gen.**" This becomes very important in view of the fact that *Amblyrhamphus prevosti* (originally written *Amblyramphus prevosti*), which is a synonym of *Sturnus holosericeus* Lichtenstein, is *not* congeneric with *Cassicus solitarius* Vieillot. As above noted, Mr. Ridgway pointed out the differences between the two forms, but failed to separate them formally. In *holosericeus* the culmen is flattened with parallel sides; the nostrils are rounded and exposed; the pileum is plain, and the tail is very strongly rounded, almost graduated. In *solitarius* the culmen is rounded and somewhat expanded towards the base; the nostrils are linear and overhung by a membrane; the pileum is crested, and the tail is less strongly rounded. In all these respects *solitarius* agrees with *Archiplanus* Cabanis (type, *Cassicus albirostris* Vieillot = *Xanthornus chrysopterus* Vigors),<sup>1</sup> and in my opinion should be referred thereto, although it differs from the type species in larger size, and in having no yellow in the plumage.

*Archiplanus* would thus seem to be a perfectly good genus, distinguished from *Cacicus* by its straighter and flatter culmen, more rounded nostrils, shorter wing-tip, and better developed crest. The several species of *Cacicus* vary considerably among themselves in all these characters, but taken as a group are sufficiently distinct. The *Agelæus sclateri* of Dubois (Bulletin Musée Royal d'Histoire Naturelle de Belgique, V, 1887, I, pl. 1), which species I have lately been permitted to examine through the courtesy of the authorities of the American Museum of Natural History, is certainly not a member of that genus, but should probably be referred to *Archiplanus*, although tending towards *Cacicus* in some respects. Possibly some other species not seen by me may belong here also. *Amblycercus* as thus restricted is very sharply defined by its entire lack of a crest, much rounded wing with very short tip, strongly rounded tail, and conspicuously flattened mesorhinium. In a linear

<sup>1</sup>The removal of this species into another genus will permit the revival of its earliest name, *albirostris* of Vieillot, which otherwise would be debarred by *Tanagra albirostris* Linnæus, 1764, which is a synonym of *Cacicus cela* (Linnæus) 1758.

sequence it should probably stand with relation to allied genera as follows: *Ostinops*, *Cassiculus*, *Archiplanus*, *Cacicus*, *Amblycercus*.

In a group in which the coloration is plain black variation, if present, can only express itself in other ways, namely, in size, relative proportions, and color of the soft parts. Up to about nine years ago it was supposed that *Amblycercus holosericeus* was a single individual species, ranging from southern Mexico to western Ecuador and Peru. Mr. Ridgway, it is true, had called attention to the remarkable range of variation in size shown by the series examined by him, but it remained for Dr. Chapman to separate the form from western Colombia and Ecuador under the name *flavirostris*. This left the way open for the writer to describe the Central American race in 1916, which was accordingly given the name *centralis*. More recently Dr. Chapman has applied the name *australis* to a bird from the highlands of Bolivia and Peru. There are thus four forms to be considered in the present review of the group.

***Amblycercus holosericeus holosericeus* (Lichtenstein).**

*Sturnus holosericeus* LICHTENSTEIN, Preis.-Verz. Mex. Vögel, 1830, 1 (Mexico).  
*Amblyramphus prevostii* LESSON, Cent. Zool., 1830, 159. pl. 54 (Mexico).

In this, the typical race, the wing is a little shorter than the tail, as shown by measurements of a small series of specimens from the States of Tamaulipas and Vera Cruz, eastern Mexico. Mr. Ridgway's measurements for birds from the same general region agree with the above in respect to the relative proportions of the wings and tail. Care must be used, however, to select for measurement only specimens in comparatively unworn plumage, as otherwise the results may be misleading. The exact range of the present race remains to be determined, no specimens from south of British Honduras having been examined in this connection. There is a possibility, too, that birds from the more elevated interior parts of Mexico and Guatemala may not be the same as those from the coast district, and that they may, indeed, belong to the form next to be considered.

***Amblycercus holosericeus centralis* Todd.**

*Amblycercus holosericeus centralis* TODD, Proc. Biol. Soc. Washington, XXIX, 1916, 95 (Rio Sicsola, Costa Rica).

In the present race the relative proportions of the wings and tail are the reverse of those in typical *holosericeus*, the former being longer than the latter. This is well shown by the series of Costa Rican specimens in the collection of the Carnegie Museum. Panama specimens in the Biological Survey collection and American Museum of Natural History are perfectly typical of this form also. According to Mr. Ridgway birds from Nicaragua

agree with those from Costa Rica. In three examples from northern Colombia (Turbaco, Cartagena, and Punto Zapote) in the Carnegie Museum the bill is given as "pale pea green" or "yellowish pea green"—precisely as in the majority of Costa Rican skins. The measurements, too, agree with those of females of *centralis* from that country. These records extend the range of *centralis* along the Caribbean coast of Colombia as far as the delta of the Magdalena River. According to Mr. Carriker (Annals Carnegie Museum, VI, 1910, 833) it ranges from sea-level in Costa Rica up to 8000 feet on the slopes of the Volcano Irazú, specimens from these respective extremes being precisely the same.

**Amblycercus flavirostris** Chapman.

*Amblycercus holosericeus flavirostris* CHAPMAN, Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist. XXXIV, 1915, 659 (Barbacoas, Colombia).

In the relative proportions of the wings and tail this form resembles *centralis*, to which it is nearest geographically, rather than *holosericeus*. It differs from *centralis*, however, in the decidedly yellow color of the bill, as said by Dr. Chapman, and as is obvious even in the dry skins, so that this author has done quite right in describing it under the name *flavirostris*. He seems to have erred, however, in referring all his Colombian specimens to this form, as shown by his tables of measurements and an inspection of the specimens themselves. After examining the type series in connection with our own I am convinced that this form should stand as a distinct species. Its characters are constant even where it approaches the range of *centralis*. It is a Tropical Zone form, strictly confined to the Colombian Pacific Fauna in Colombia and Ecuador, since records cited by Dr. Chapman from the interior at higher altitudes all prove to belong to the long-tailed Subtropical Zone form *australis*, as will be shown beyond.

**Amblycercus australis** Chapman.

*Amblycercus holosericeus australis* CHAPMAN, Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., XLI, 1919, 333 (Incachaca, Bolivia).

*Amblycercus holosericeus* subsp. TODD and CARRIKER, Ann. Carnegie Mus., XIV, 1922, 478 (Heights of Chirua, Colombia).

When I wrote my notes on *Amblycercus* for the paper above cited I was unable to place the series at hand from the Santa Marta region with any degree of certainty. A male from the Temperate Zone of the Eastern Andes of Colombia (Ramirez) and a female from the Subtropical Zone of the Western Andes (Sancudo) agree with the Santa Marta series, which, it will be noted, come from the Subtropical Zone also. Not only are they alike in having the tail longer than the wing, but also in the color of the bill, in life (as noted on the labels) as well as in the dried state. Dr. Chapman's measurements for his birds from the higher elevations in Colombia (*i. e.*, Rio Toché and El Piñon) agree with those of the above specimens, instead of *flavirostris*, his birds from the interior having been wrongly referred to the latter, as shown by actual examination of the specimens involved. On the other hand, they agree well (except for slightly smaller size) with the bird from Bolivia which Dr. Chapman has called *australis*, the characters

ascribed to which are confirmed by a topotype in the collection of the Carnegie Museum. Three specimens from the Andes of Merida (Le Cuchilla) are also referable to the same form. *Amblycercus australis* is thus shown to range from the highlands of Bolivia and Peru northward into the Andes of Colombia (all three ranges), the Andes of Venezuela, and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Oddly enough, in the relative proportions of the wings and tail it is like typical *holosericeus* of Mexico, but may be told from that form by its brighter, more yellowish bill, as shown in the dried skin, and which is probably well marked in life. The bill averages a little smaller and slenderer, too. Although the differences are thus so slight, I believe that they are of specific value, the more so in view of the fact that *australis* is not known except from the Subtropical and Temperate Zones in South America, while *holosericeus* is primarily a form of the Tropical Zone, and is moreover separated from *australis* by the intervention of *centralis* and *flavirostris*, both short-tailed forms.

The distribution of the several forms of *Amblycercus* raises some interesting questions as to their origin and dispersal, which I hope to discuss at some future time.